New York
Theatre Critics' Reviews
1945

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THEATRE OPENINGS

"It's a Gift"
"Foolish Notion"
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"Dark of the Moon"
"Happily Ever After"

Complete reviews appear in this issue

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the compelte reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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"Happily Ever After"

Comedy by Donald Kirkley and Howard Burman; staging by Crane Wilbur; settings by Watson Barratt; presented by Bernard Klawans and Victor Payne-Jennings at the Biltmore Theatre, March 15, 1945.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
March 16, 1945

'Happily Ever After' Presented at Biltmore

By ROBERT GARLAND

LAST NIGHT was by way of being Baltimore night at the Biltmore. Or Maryland night, at any rate. For "Happily Ever After" is a farce about Maryland by a couple of Baltimoreans. Drama critics, no less. Donald Kirkley and Howard Burman, by name.

You've heard of Elkton, surely? Elkton's the Gretna Green on the Baltimore-Philadelphia highway, just south of the Mason-Dixon Line. And Elkton's the locale of last night's arrival.

They'll marry you in nothing flat, in Elkton. They'll marry you at the drop of a dollar. They'll marry you at the hint of a license. They'll marry you between trains. Or while the automobile waits. Or in the middle of the night.

So what could be more natural than for Mr. Kirkley and Mr. Burman to get together in some Baltimore bar and decide to write a play about a Rev. Whatcoat and his Maryland marriage mill?

Take one marrying parson. Give him a loving, if stupid wife. And a faithful, if tipsy, Man Friday. And a dubious, if not unexpected, past. And a tricky, if slapstick, mise en scene. And a couple of couples waiting to be married.

There you've got your play. Or should have. Act one, in the morning. Act two, in the early afternoon. Act three, a little later on. A normal day in Elkton, Maryland's Gretna Green.

This is farce. But as comedy they play it.

Dither of Delight

When the curtain rises at the Biltmore, the Rev. Homer Whatcoat is on the verge of celebrating his 10,000th ceremony. Cameramen are on hand to immortalize it in the newsreels. Special writers are on hand to immortalize it in the public press. History's stirring.

And the Rev. Whatcoat is in a dither of delight. He sees nothing questionable in his three-minute marriages. To the contrary. Is he not making the world a better and more legitimate place to love in?

It's just about here that the Rev. Whatcoat's medicine-show past begins to rear its ugly head. Past and present, egged on by the long arm of coincidence, gang up on him. Maybe the marrying parson isn't a parson after all. Maybe his mumbo-jumbo isn't legal.

Could be. And is! All these 9,999 knot-tyings don't mean a thing. All these forty, even fifty thousand offspring are, to put it abruptly illigitimate. There's a seven letter word for it in 47th Street.

And imagine, if you can, 40 or 50,000 of them. It's too much, really. So Playwrights Kirkley and Burman tie matters up neatly enough before the final curtain. There's no need to worry as you're getting yourself back home.

There's a secondary plot in which a supposedly ardent young newspaperwoman is hellbent for the affections of a not-so-ardent young newspaperman, only to turn prudish on him in the end.

They strike me as being sort of sluggish.

Farce or Comedy?

It seems to me that "Happily Ever After" suffers from Crane Wilbur's misguided direction. Donald Kirkley and Howard Burman have written a farce that calls for constant and well-paced movement. From the start it should stand up and get a move on. It doesn't.

As a matter of regret, it dawdles. And, I fear, Gene Lockhart is the outstanding dawdler. As the marrying parson from Maryland, he is slow and sweet and altogether charming.

But he's not the Rev. Homer Whatcoat the story has in mind. The Rev. Homer Whatcoat visible at the Biltmore could never have been the things or done the things the story says he has. He just hasn't got it in him. He's too nice a guy for the playwrights' good.

Then, as the lovers, Warren Douglas and Margaret Hayes — I hope that I'm correct where these names are concerned—are completely out of character. I don't believe in them, either.

And, here again, I'm of the opinion that the direction is at fault. "Happily Ever After" isn't these young folks' play. Not by any means. Yet they're played up as if it were. By which I mean to insist that they're made to seem overly important.

It's Parker Fennelly as the Rev. Whatcoat's Man Friday who keeps his characterization in the proper farcical groove. And, because he does, he's delightful. The others are actors, acting. All except Kathleen Lockhart. She's a dear. But she, too, is misdirected.

"Happily Ever After" most certainly has its moments. But they're lacking in sound and hurry.

THE CAST

Charley Porter	Parker Fennelly
Martha Whatcoat	Kathleen Lockhart
Sam Jarvis	George Calvert
Rev. Homer Whatcoat	Gene Lockhart
Alec Dixon	Warren Douglas
Rita Collins	Margaret Hayes
David MacDonald	Barry Macollum
Beulah Robinson	Dulcie Cooper
Mack	William Thomson
Dinty	William C. Tubbs
H. A. Stillwater	Herbert Heyes
Stubbs	Nicholas Saunders
Stan	Charles Wallis
Lil	Melba Rae
Sheriff	Hans Robert

NEW YORK TIMES
March 16, 1945

Gretna Green, Inc.

By LEWIS NICHOLS

DONALD KIRKLEY is the well-known and able drama critic of The Baltimore Sun and Howard Burnam is the Variety mugg stationed in that city. Tired of sitting on the gloomy side of the theatre's footlights, they have vaulted to the stage as the authors of "Happily Ever After." It would be any newspaper man's pleasure to be able to report that two fellow-workers had put the professional playwrights in their place. Perhaps some day the Messrs. Kirkley and Burnam will do so. But their first attempt, which opened last evening at the Biltmore, is too old-fashioned, too sentimental and not quite lively enough for Broadway's way of life. There are a few good lines in the course of the evening, but not nearly enough to carry a satisfactory comedy.

Being Baltimoreans, the authors have looked at the Gretna Greens and general marrying habits of Maryland in the "not so long ago." Their story tells of a parson who has married 9,999 couples, and is about to celebrate his 10,000th service, when it comes out he had not been ordained. All those ceremonies could have been null and void, as well as the children thereof. The authors picture the home of the marrying parson, the advertising, the backdrops of Niagara Falls for the couples who can't afford to go there, the newsreel company which comes down to take pictures of the ceremony. At the end, the Messrs. Kirkley and Burman find a way to make everything legal, but what they have not found is a way to make their evening generally amusing.

Back from a long siege in the films, Gene Lockhart is the parson. He is likable, he is rotund and gentle. The authors quite properly gave him most of the good things in the play, but they also load him with several oversentimentalized speeches. Parker Fennelly is the parson's "witness," who gets four bits per service; he had been the assistant when the Rev. Homer Whatcoat was in the medicine-show game. Kathleen Lockhart is the parson's wife, as in life, and the two young people who come to get a story for the (AP) are played by Warren Douglas and Margaret Hayes. Watson Barrat has designed a gaudy setting of cupids and backdrops of Niagara Falls.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
March 16, 1945

Beware the Ides of March

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

DONALD KIRKLEY, one of the authors of *Happily Ever After*, is Baltimore's best drama critic—at least of other people's plays. And Howard Burman, Mr. Kirkley's accomplice, is the shrewd Baltimore correspondent for *Variety*. But for all their savvy, their current contraption at the Biltmore leaves them as wide open as a health crank's bedroom windows. I have no choice but to load up, aim and fire. For the two of them have set such a grim example that probably no drama critic will now dare to write a play for 30 or 40 years.

Happily Ever After, is, to be sure, no massive debacle—just a little comedy that's horribly old-fashioned, incredibly corny, and monstrously dull. A job about a Gretna-Green kind of parson who has married 10,000 couples free of charge but collected heavily on illuminated certificates, wedding rings, insurance policies and tourist cabins. A kindly if crass sort who, it soon turns out, isn't really a parson at all. There ensue assorted complications, most of them turning on the illegitimate offspring the parson is responsible for (one of them, can you beat it, being the very crusader who is out for the parson's scalp.) It's pretty painful. Even so, I'd have let the whole thing off as just a misdemeanor but for the parson's little oration on marriage at the end. But there you can actually see the corn fermenting — and making moonshine in, and must be treated as, a crime.

Gene Lockhart plays the parson in his very human way; and a good many other people do the authors' bidding as best they can. But the whole thing is just a bore—unless it's some kind of Baltimore prank.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
March 16, 1945

Comic Souffle

By HOWARD BARNES

THE astute judge of dramatic doings on "The Baltimore Sun," Donald Kirkley, has taken a whack at playwriting himself. Together with Howard Burman, he has concocted a comic souffle in "Happily Ever After" which, unhappily, has a tendency to collapse. There are funny notions in the new Biltmore Theater exhibit. They are given every chance in the world by such canny players as Gene and Kathleen Lockhart, Parker Fennelly and Hans Robert. Still and all, the show is lean on laughter.

* * *

The authors of the piece make merry with the Maryland marriage racket, but they are never quite sure whether to be sentimental or sarcastic. The sentimental aspects of "Happily Ever After" are the best, particularly in a penultimate speech by Gene Lockhart which is an eloquent testament to true wedlock. The farce, which exposes the Rev. Homer Whatcoat as a medicine man in preacher's clothing, suggests the illegitimacy of several thousand children, and finally permits him to turn the tables on his detractors, is definitely lumbering.

Situations are far better than the play of wit and satire in this production. The big laugh of the show comes when a newsreel company arrives at the marrying parson's cupid's nest with a couple of marathon dancers, and the tired hoofers conk off as the ceremony is about to be performed. It scarcely constitutes enough solid amusement for a three-act play. For most of the time "Happily Ever After" is getting old Rev. Whatcoat into jams and extricating him from them with a minimum of dramatic imagination.

* * *

Kirkley and his collaborator are fortunate in having the Lockharts as principal characters in their piece. As the Whatcoats they give the work a recurring lift of sharp characterization and pungent pantomime. Gene Lockhart, dismissing the town's big shot by telling him to play his own pitch, is affable and engaging. Mrs. Lockhart gives a steady and buoyant performance as the understanding spouse of the man who likes to see people get married. Fennelly is fine as the guitar player from a medicine show who has become a professional marriage witness and Warren Douglas and Margaret Hayes struggle with the romance in the plot. "Happily Ever After" runs through quite a few comic ups and downs, but it never takes off.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
March 16, 1945

An OPA Price Ceiling Might Aid Stage—or, 'Happily Ever After'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

WHEN it was indicated in Washington that Chester Bowles of the OPA wants a price ceiling on movies, and that a price ceiling on other forms of entertainment would be a logical development, I was in favor. No movie is worth $1.75 and no play is worth $6, $5.40 or $4.80—not in a sound economy.

The more I think of it the more I favor the OPA stepping in, because it would relieve me of a certain amount of worry and that is what any powerful government always says it is going to do for its subjects. If the Bowles Plan were in operation you wouldn't have to be reading this notice about "Happily Ever After," a play which opened last night at the Biltmore Theatre, and if you wouldn't have to be reading it I wouldn't have to be writing it.

The OPA, as any housewife knows, grades things. You pay two bits for five small oranges and four bits for six large ones, and the difference between big white eggs and big brown eggs is two cents a dozen, or whatever. So you take a play like "Happily Ever After."

Bernard Klawans and Victor Payne-Jennings tell the OPA they want to produce it. It is perfectly legal to produce a comedy, so the OPA says, "Sure, go ahead—but let's set a ceiling on it first." The Bowles minions in Washington look it over and say, "Go ahead. It isn't bad at all. It is mildly funny, and Gene Lockhart and all the people in it are very pleasant.

A Nice Little Story

"It tells a story about a medicine man who gets himself a permanent pitch as a marrying parson in Maryland and links 10,000 couples in happy wedlock before somebody exposes him as a phony. It has a love angle about a boy and girl who work for the Associated Press (Warren Douglas and Margaret Hayes), and we will let this pass although we doubt that anybody could work for the Associated Press and be in love.

"It's a nice little play, really. You may produce it, Mr. Klawans and Mr. Payne-Jennings, and we suppose it will become a nice little movie. Our blessings upon you.

". . . Oh, yes. We think that a dollar and a half would be about the right price for the best seats. Good-bye, Mr. Payne-Jennings and Mr. Klawans."

This would eliminate all the trouble of putting on "Happily Ever After" at the Biltmore Theatre, for in these days—until the OPA gets on the job—nobody would dream of producing a dollar-and-a-half play for a buck fifty. They want $3.60 for it, and $4.80 on the opening night.

NEW YORK POST
March 16, 1945

'Happily Ever After' Drops In En Route to Hollywood

By WILELLA WALDORF

DONALD KIRKLEY and Howard Burman who do a lot of play reviewing in Baltimore, have suddenly awakened to the fact that nobody has written a comedy about Elkton, the Gretna Green of Maryland, in some time now. Getting out pencils and paper, they hastily assembled a list of perfectly screaming suggestions for the scenic designer and prop man, thought up a few gags about eloping couples and the marriage racket, tossed in a sober little sermon on holy matrimony and called the result a comedy. Under the title "Happily Ever After" it was revealed at the Biltmore Theatre last night.

But even on Broadway you can't make a comedy out of a background full of gadgets and half a dozen gags. Or can you? It seems the Messrs. Kirkley and Burman have. Anyhow, they got the thing produced and it won't be long now before it's a Warner Bros. picture. Lights! Action! Camera!

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
March 16, 1945

'Happily Ever After' Is Uninspired Effort

By BURTON RASCOE

GENE AND KATHLEEN LOCKHART are such an endearing and talented stage couple that I wish my report on "Happily Ever After," which opened at the Biltmore, could be more optimistic; but I suspect that this dreary little piece of mechanical shoddy, which a movie company heavily financed, will not last out its limited tenure at the Biltmore and that, some months hence, it will be one of those rather horrible pictures on a double-feature bill, which you will try your best (without conspicuous success) to avoid.

The story is about one of those American Gretna Greens—those towns along Highways 1 and 2, after you get into Delaware and Maryland—where you are greeted by the neon lights of a marrying parson, who will splice you any time of the day and night, furnish the license, witness and everything and rent you a honeymoon, over-night cabin, total cost only 5 bucks, not counting breakfast.

No Objections

So far as I can see, there is nothing wrong in these Gretna Greens and I have no moral, or any other objections to the unintentional fraud practiced by Gene Lockhart in this play. It turns out that 20-odd years ago, this faker, this patented-medicine showman and barker, who had presumed to marry people, really was an ordained deacon of a Protestant sect—a title conferred upon him when he was only a witness and general handyman around a previous parson's household and thus was entitled to marry eager young couples, even though he didn't know it.

The idea for this comedy is very good; but it is worked out so mechanically that you can hardly bear it. There is a young couple—an AP reporter and his sweetheart, both supposed to be working on the same story—who are married, for publicity purposes, as the 10,000th couple wedded by the showman deacon, Mr. Lockhart. The reporter wants to expose Mr. Lockhart and so does a local politician (who would like to get his name in the papers as a reformer) and the reporter deliberately goes through the marriage ceremony with his loving bride—for the newsreel cameras—only to get a good scoop—believing his marriage is illegal.

Good Idea

Mr. Lockhart, in the end, renders an eloquent and logical homily on the marriage state; when two people have loved each other, borne children, or have hoped to bear children, and have assumed the obligations and responsibilities of married life, it doesn't much matter how the form of the ceremony was conducted—it was a sacred pledge between two adult persons, and let no man strike this pledge asunder even if he is a righteous illegitimate son, who is a candidate for office.

The play has a good idea in it. It is unfortunate that it is so theatrical, so mechanical, and so dull. A comedy should have laughs and this one hasn't. There is an amusing set by Watson Barratt.

NEW YORK SUN
March 16, 1945

'Happily Ever After' Brings Gene Lockhart, and Offers Very Little Fun

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE REV. HOMER WHATCOAT, once a sharper and spieler of the medicine shows, who found himself in Maryland one day and decided to put out some signs and go into the marrying business, comes to the drama in "Happily Ever After," which brings forth Gene Lockhart, some amusing props—and very little fun. It was presented last night at the Biltmore.

This fourth offering of a generally disappointing Broadway week is the work of two newspaper men of Baltimore—Donald Kirkley, dramatic critic of the Sun, and Howard Burman, Baltimore's reviewer for Variety. They both report dutifully and intelligently upon the plays that get down to Ford's, on U. S. 40, and now they've written one of their own. Bernard Klawans and Victor Payne-Jennings have produced it.

There is a comical idea in "Happily Ever After," that of a Gretna Green preacher having performed 10,000 ceremonies and never having bothered to get himself ordained, but the Messrs. Kirkley and Burman have done nothing with it. Their comedy is of the manufactured variety; the troubles of the Rev. Whatcoat, upon whom a wrathful citizens' committee is descending, produces scant amusement, and the eventual Whatcoat triumph isn't hilarious, nor is it a great surprise.

Gene Lockhart, brought on from Hollywood, is the erstwhile medicine show man who gets into the marriage racket in Maryland (presumably near Elkton), equips his cottage with Niagara Falls backdrops, and goes in for profitable sidelines, selling wedding rings, fancy marriage certificates, insurance, cookbooks and honeymoon cabins. Mr. Lockhart, a good actor, is genial and wistful by turn, but "Happily Ever After" remains a dull, apathetic and humdrum comedy throughout the evening.

Crane Wilbur, of screen renown and an actor hereabouts in other years, has done the direction. Kathleen Lockhart plays the homey Mrs. Whatcoat. Parker Fennelly appears as the professional witness of the Whatcoat establishment, and Margaret Hayes, certainly one of the prettiest girls in town, is a girl photographer, engaged with a romance of her own. Watson Barratt has designed a cozy small-town interior, tricked up to the needs of matrimony.

If Mr. Kirkley were writing for his Baltimore paper of such a comedy as "Happily Ever After" I believe that he would say that it has the summer theater look, needs work, and a very great deal. And Mr. Burman could sum it up in two words in his report to Variety. Doubtful click.

"Dark of the Moon"

Legend with music by Howard Richardson and William Berney; staging by Robert E. Perry; music by Walter Hendl; settings by George Jenkins; dances by Esther Junger; presented by the Messrs. Shubert at the Forty-Sixth Street Theatre, March 14, 1945.

THE CAST

John	Richard Hart
Conjur Man	Ross Matthew
The Dark Witch	Iris Whitney
The Fair Witch	Marjorie Belle
Conjur Woman	Georgia Simmons
Hank Gudger	John Gerstad
Miss Metcalf	Frances Goforth
Mr. Jenkins	Gar Moore
Uncle Smelique	Roy Fant
Mrs. Summey	Kathryn Cameron
Edna Summey	Millicent Coleman
Mr. Atkins	James Lanphier
Mrs. Bergen	Agnes Scott Yost
Ella Bergen	Tony Eden
Burt Dinwitty	Robert Pryor
Hattie Heffner	Peggy Ann Holmes
Mr. Bergen	Allan Tower
Mr. Summey	Stanley Nelson
Marvin Hudgens	John Gifford
Barbara Allen	Carol Stone
Floyd Allen	Conrad Janis
Mrs. Allen	Maidel Turner
Mr. Allen	Sherod Collins
Preacher Haggler	Winfield Hoeny
Greeny Gorman	Dorothy I. Lambert

Other Witches—Marguerite de Anguera
Jinx Heffelfinger, Peggy Ann Holmes
and Lil Llandre.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
March 15, 1945

Witchcraft But No Magic

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

IF GOOD will (on the part of actors and audience alike) were all that is needed to make a play succeed, *Dark of the Moon* could indeed be acclaimed a success this morning. For here is an attempt—that attempt that critics are constantly urging of playwrights—to do something different, something imaginative, on Broadway. Here is the stuff of balladry, fleshed and touched with stage color; here folkways have tried to exert their charm, and witchcraft to weave its spell. Out of all this, moreover, have come some pleasant little scenes, some nice effects of atmosphere and singing. But in general *Dark of the Moon* is a venture that just doesn't come off; that is faint in its magic and faltering in its moods; that can't make its folkways beguiling enough; and that, to see its story through a whole evening, has to pad and stretch and attenuate it. The production, I think, is as much in fault as the play; the cast is likeable, but it can't dance or sing or act so as to quicken the tempo or strengthen the illusion.

What *Dark of the Moon* re-tells is the well-known ballad of Barbara Allen, the girl for whose sake a witch boy pined to be human. Human the Conjur Woman made him, on condition that Barbara should remain faithful to him for a year after their marriage. But when his old identity came to light, the Christian community enforced unfaithfulness upon Barbara; the boy, once more a witch, went back to his mountains, and Barbara went to her death.

So primitive and unearthly a story allows for the greatest freedom of treatment, and welcomes music and dancing and ritual; but it does demand a certain poetry and intensity, and these are but fitfully provided in *Dark of the Moon*. Too much of it is only prose trying to be poetry. For myself I balked less at the eerie phases of the play than at the folksy ones. There was never much magic, except perhaps in George Jenkins' very effective sets, but there was at least an element of strangeness; whereas the folk doings and dialect, and even the folksongs and dancing, seemed just about what those things usually are in uninspired folk drama; they didn't have the right fetching air about them, or the right fresh accent. So that their appeal soon palled; and when, soon after, the story itself began to drag, *Dark of the Moon* just became something that was happening on the stage. You felt well-disposed toward it, but not much interested.

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Richard Hart, who plays the Witch Boy after one very brief appearance on Broadway, does a very nice job with a difficult part, though he still needs seasoning as an actor. Carol Stone's Barbara has more individuality than skill; and the minor rolls range from adequate to a good deal less. One trouble may be that simple parts usually require much more finese than they would seem to, and call for pretty experienced actors. The direction, too, is inexpert.

NEW YORK TIMES
March 15, 1945

"Dark of the Moon"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

"DARK OF THE MOON" is the kind of play an audience instinctively hopes to like. It is off the beaten path, far removed from drawing-room comedy and battered farce. On its way to the Forty-sixth Street Theatre, it turned over the pages of a success story the theatre admires. It won a prize, was tried out in a summer theatre, was bought for Broadway, and coming with it were some of the players who had been in it at the start. But all the good will in the world cannot disguise the facts of the case. "Dark of the Moon" has a better idea than execution, it tries to do more than it has been able to accomplish. Grant the play its virtues in differing from the average evening in the Forties, it still is not a complete success on its own terms.

Howard Richardson and William Berney are the authors, and the play, itself, is a dramatization of the Barbara Allen legend. That concerns a witch boy from the mountains who wants to be human so he can marry Barbara. The conjure man agrees, on the condition that Barbara be faithful to him for a year. On the last night of that year, after her family and neighbors has been denouncing the boy as a witch, Barbara, at a revival service, is unfaithful. The witch boy, having lost, is changed back again from his human form, and Barbara dies.

In the play, the simplicity of the story is the chief thing which gets in the way of dramatic interest. Since the authors have few incidents on which to base action, they must resort to padding. Sometimes this takes the form of ballad singing—part of it is very good—and sometimes just conversation. As the scene is a ridge in the Smoky Mountains, the play is in dialect, an occasional scene being too coyly folksy. Most of the incidents—the marriage, the child-birth, the revival service—are far too long for their value to the story, and the service, itself, is no different from other revivals. There is a suspicion that the legend of Barbara Allen would make a better twenty-minute ballet than it does "a legend with music."

• • •

The two chief performers, both of whom were in the tryout at Cambridge, Mass., last Summer, are Richard Hart and Carol Stone. The former is making his second appearance on Broadway, his first in a leading role. It is a difficult part, and Mr. Hart generally carries it off with ease. Miss Stone, with a Smoky Mountain swagger and a mass of red hair, is an excellent Barbara. The preacher is played by Winfield Hoeny, and Uncle Smelique, who sings to the geetar, by Roy Fant. The cast is a large one, most of the roles being minor, either in the land of witches or among members of humanity.

Since "Dark of the Moon" is fantasy, George Jenkins, the designer, has offered settings in that mood; they form a good background. The music includes an occasional ballad—a bit of "Barbara Allen" is one—and some incidental tunes by Walter Hendl. They, too, are in keeping; they are lightly played and have a good rhythm. Esther Junger has been responsible for the dances, one of which involves the efforts of witch girls to persuade the witch boy he doesn't like being a human. Robert E. Perry directed. "Dark of the Moon" had everyone on its side last evening, but its friends were on the wrong side of the lights to do anything about making it a better play.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
March 15, 1945

Promising

By HOWARD BARNES

THERE is a rich fund of poetry and theatrical imagery in "Dark of the Moon." Howard Richardson and William Berney have dramatized a legend with considerable stage effect. Walter Hendl has added some dissonant improvisations on folk songs to sustain the witching mood of the new play at the Forty-sixth Street Theater. It is easy to see why the work won the Maxwell Anderson award for verse drama. At the same time, the Broadway production must be tagged with all the qualifications that are connoted by the word promising.

• • •

For the authors have become rather hopelessly befuddled by their dramatic consideration of a witch boy in the Smoky Mountains, who asks a conjur man to change him into a human being so that he can court Barbara Allen. Much of the action is concerned with his desperate and ill-fated enterprise. Numerous tangents to the plot satirize Baptist revival meetings and general hillbilly doings. With Robert E. Perry's sensitive staging, the show has some of the magical appeal of its subject matter. Too often it is rather ridiculous.

• • •

The ancient folk ballad offered numerous opportunities for stage fantasy in its account of a male witch who sacrificed 300 years of flying to the moon and howling in graveyards for a romance with a Smoky Mountain stumble-bum. Richardson and Berney have capitalized brilliantly on the netherworld aspects of their material and have sometimes threaded these delicately with a tale of somber living in a superstitious community. Unfortunately, the drama is out at the seams on numerous occasions, with the fantasy militating in no uncertain manner against the background of actual living, which is a springboard for the flights of fancy.

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The performers, although relatively unknown, do handsomely by the production. Richard Hart is particularly good as the witch boy who comes to wonder why he ever wanted to be human. Carol Stone makes a lusty portrait of the Barbara Allen of the legend and the others acquit themselves with skill and sincerity. One should applaud a brave new venture in make-believe. "Dark of the Moon" deserves considerable applause. But, in the words of the script, "that don't make no never-much."

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
March 15, 1945

Imagination and Style Illumine a Folk Tale, 'Dark of the Moon'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"DARK OF THE MOON," to which the Shuberts have given a beautiful production at the 46th St. Theatre, is a witches' tale of the Great Smoky Mountains. It is a full-length, full-stage treatment in verse, song, dance and stylized playing of a hillbilly folk-song about a girl who marries a

witch and the dire results thereof.

The disadvantage of "Dark of the Moon" is, I think, that it is full-length; that it is made to be an entire evening in the theatre. It is hard to maintain an attitude — an assumed attitude — for a spell of time without wearying, as you may realize by trying to hold an artful pose for two minutes.

Yet in this production is much good theatre, much to be admired in a season which has been mostly matter-of-fact. It has imagination, integrity, a willingness to take one venturing into strange places. It is punctuated by moments that are excitingly picturesque and moments that are stirring.

A Hillbilly Legend

It is something which those who have more than a surface interest in the stage — those who want to see what the stage can do beyond the usual routine—should see. Those who merely want to see a "show," or a wow, may not be willing to stay with it.

The song upon which "Dark of the Moon" is based is "Barbara Allen," a ballad about a witch-boy who falls in love with a human girl and begs a conjur-woman to make him human, too, so that he may wed her. The request is granted—upon condition that the girl remain faithful for one year. If she does not do so, he must leave his love and become a witch again.

The play is by Howard Richardson and William Berney. In 1942 it won the Maxwell Anderson award for the best American poetic drama. Last Summer it was tried out in Cambridge, Mass., and now the Shuberts have brought it here with Carol Stone and Richard Hart in the central roles which they created.

Settings by Jenkins

The Broadway producers had the script, the principals, the intelligent and helpful score of Walter Handl and the services of Robert E. Perry as director. To all this they have added settings by George Jenkins, who is a conjurman among stage artists. In seven scenes which are potently simple, Jenkins has evoked the darkly brooding quality of the Smokies and the primitive state of their inhabitants, with their stores and cabins and churches.

To this, too, they have given some dances, witches' dances, staged by Esther Junger, which fit in mood and pattern.

Miss Stone is excellent as the lusty, earthy Barbara, and so is Mr. Hart as the weird and moody witch-boy. In a large company there are many colorful bits, and a Baptist Church revival meeting in the second act is a stirring and cleverly staged high point.

Often "Dark of the Moon" seems to be a white man's "Green Pastures" or "Porgy" in its stylized folk-quality—but it lacks the sustained power of either of these.

NEW YORK POST
March 15, 1945

'Dark of the Moon' a Lusty Hill-Billy Saga With Songs

By WILELLA WALDORF

A LEGEND with music inspired by the folk-lore of North Carolina's Smoky Mountains sounds as if it might be revoltingly arty and poetically soporific, but "Dark of the Moon," produced last night at the 46th St. Theatre, has gusto and vitality, lusty humor and a natural, easy-going way of introducing folk-songs that add up to an engaging evening among the Broadway hillbillies.

"Dark of the Moon" is based on the old ballad about Barbara Allen, a mountain gal who so powerfully affected a Witch Boy from over old Baldy way that he got the Conjur Woman to change him into a human and married her. But, as the ballad goes on to state at considerable length and with a great many lyrical flourishes, the plan didn't work out very well. Barbara believed in her humanized Witch Boy, but the mountain folk with their superstitions and their fears and their Baptist preacher were too much for her.

Howard Richardson and William Berney have told the story over again in flowing theatrical style without posing too self-consciously as poetic dramatists, and Robert E. Perry, with the aid of a corps of experts and technicians, has staged the production with skill and imagination. George Jenkins' settings are unfailingly atmospheric, while Walter Handl's incidental music, played by a pit orchestra from time to time, fits into the mood very effectively.

Most of the folk-songs and the hymn singing, however, are introduced spontaneously with guitar or accordion accompaniment, and the revival meeting is conducted with no instrumental effects whatever. The large company acts, sings and dances amiably and gracefully in an easy-going fashion not too professionally slick to fit into the locale, and there's a swing and spirit to the best scenes that had some of the audience tapping its feet, and even humming a bit.

Carol Stone and Richard Hart play Barbara and her Witch Boy husband very well indeed, and there are so many capable performances in the supporting cast that it is impossible to list them all here, except to remark that Roy Fant and Conrad Janis do some cheery warbling and that Winfield Hoeny's portrait of a fire and brimstone preacher is enough to convert the most hardened sinner.

Having enjoyed most of "Dark of the Moon," we must now sound a sour note. The hero's former girl-friends, witches all, living on Bald Mountain and deploring his absence, are got up like Winter Garden chorus girls, and make a great point of displaying their legs and trying to lure him back to his old haunts with the honeyed phrases of a bevy of baby vamps.

They are on the scene far too much, and after a while, every time they began popping out of trees or coming down from the mountain in puffs of fog (but still showing those legs as persistently as so many Gypsy Rose Lees) they gave us a laugh that was not in the script.

Don't think we insist that all witches must be toothless hags on broomsticks. On the other hand, we doubt very much if they are luscious dolls accustomed to traipse about the mountain dressed for the finale of the "Follies."

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
March 15, 1945

Weird Hillbilly Lore Told in 'Dark of the Moon'

By BURTON RASCOE

"DARK OF THE MOON," a Carolina hill-folk legend with music, which opened at the 46th Street Theater last night, is a weird, fascinating and very unusual theatrical entertainment, about which I suspect there will be a lot of controversy. Those who like it are apt to overpraise it and those who don't like it are likely to damn it from hell to breakfast. For myself, I found it an enriching and pleasurable experience, though I must add that I am not wild about it. I merely thank the Messrs. Shubert for being so daringly experimental and offering a theatrical pleasure that is difficult either to appraise or describe.

It is mostly on the grim side. The settings by George Jenkins are stark and uncomfortable, suggesting the poverty, the hard fight for a livelihood among the Wesleyean brethern of the Carolina mountains. But there are alleviations: witch-girls, as sensual, seductive and sirenic as the lovely destructive ladies of Greek and Norse mythology, loll and writhe on the stirated rocks of Old Baldy in the Great Smokies and dance corybantically, like the princesses of Cybele, in the moonlight when they want to win back their hill-billy witch-boy.

Suggests Other Plays

There are scenes which suggest "Tobacco Road," "Oklahoma," "Sing Out, Sweet Land," and "Run Little Chillun," especially there is a revival scene which suggests the highest moment in Hal Johnson's Deep South Negro musical. But, since the out-of-town tryouts, they have cut out the most orgiastic ritual of this emotional frenzy and have, thereby, let it be not quite clear how Barbara Allen broke her promise to the witch-boy.

There are, it seems, 200 versions of the folk ballad, "Barbara Allen," upon which this play is based, and the one chosen by Howard Richardson (27 years old) and William Berney (23 years old), both Southerners but graduate students of the University of Iowa, and winners, with this play, of the annual Maxwell Anderson award at Leland Stanford for the best American poetic play, is the one which begins:

"A witch-boy from the mountain came
A-pinin' to be human
For he had seen the fairest gal
The blue-eyed Barbara Allen.
O Conjur Man, O Conjur Man
Please do this thing I'm wantin'
Just change me to a human man
For Barbara I'd be courtin'."

The witch-boy wins Barbara, in spite of the dire misgivings of the hill people; but Barbara is as weak as her worst enemies among the womenfolk say she is, and she allows herself to be debauched by the town bully; and so she dies and the witch-boy is restored to witchhood. With his Barbara, for he got very sick of being human.

Effective Play

I have seen Old Baldy and the Great Smokies and eaten the wonderful perch and croppies that are to be found in the stream below Old Baldy and I have talked to the Cherokees, men and women, who have a reservation in that region; and I know the people of Ashville and Truro and of the fertile valleys around there, where you can get the finest sorghum and the best Tennessee country hams you ever tasted.

Whether they do or not, they have made an effective play out of "Dark of the Moon," and I have just enough space to pay my compliments to Richard Hart, Marjorie Belle, Carol Stone (daughter of Fred), Roy Fant (a sort of Burl Ives of the play) and Winfield Hoeny. And Marguerite de Anguera, Jinx Heffelfinger, Peggy Ann Holmes and Lili Liandre, as the other witches, are very bewitchingly adorned by Nature and by Peggy Clark, the costumer.

NEW YORK SUN
March 15, 1945

'Dark of the Moon' Has Imagination and Color, Falters in Second Act

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE Messrs. Shubert brought the lore and the legends, the chants and the square dances, the hymns and the prayers of the mountain people of the Great Smokies of North Carolina to the 46th Street last night in "Dark of the Moon." It is a folk play of color, atmosphere and imagination, but with hardly enough substance for a full evening in the theater.

The first half of "Dark of the Moon," with its glimpses of the central square of Buck Creek, of a cabin interior on Chunky Gal Mountain, and the general store of Buck Creek, provide real feeling of the mountain country, but in the second act, in which the Witch Boy, born of witch and buzzard, is on his way back to the supernatural, the play falters and loses a lot of its early magic.

It is, however, an unusual piece and is rather well played and George Jenkins, who lighted the play and designed the exciting settings, has done a beautiful job.

"Dark of the Moon" is the dramatization by Howard Richardson and William Berney of one of the many versions of the hillbilly ballad of "Barbara Allen" and upon the stage of the 46th there is enacted the fable of John, the Witch Boy, whose eyes have fallen upon the buxom beauty of the valley — Barbara Allen, of the blue eyes and the copper-colored hair. He makes a bargain with the Conjur Woman to be turned into a human so that he can marry the girl. But it is a condition of the bargain that if she is untrue to him before the end of a year he will be returned to the Witch Girls. In the frenzy of a revival meeting at the Church of God Barbara is set upon by the congregation to break the witch's spell and she yields to Marvin Hudgens. Barbara goes to her death on the mountain top and the Witch Boy returns to riding the eagle among the mists and the peaks of the Great Smokies.

The role of the Witch Boy is played with

excitement and vigor by the lithe Richard Hart. Carol Stone is surprisingly good as the tragic girl of the valley. There are excellent folk-character performances from Winfield Hoeny, as Preacher Haggler, who doesn't mind a nip of good corn from the jug; from John Gifford, as the mountain bully and seducer; from Maidel Turner, as Barbara's Ma, and from Sherod Collins as her Pa, who hangs his squirrel rifle over the fireplace. There's a nice bit, too, from Frances Goforth as the spinster of the Great Smokies, who buys her calico at the general store.

Robert E. Perry has staged the play for the Shuberts, there is some appropriate music by Walter Hendl, and John Huntington has supervised the productions.

I liked a lot of "Dark of the Moon," found it frequently stimulating, and wanted to like the whole of it. But it doesn't quite come off.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
March 15, 1945

Shuberts Present 'Dark of the Moon'

By ROBERT GARLAND

CAROL STONE . . .

To change the subject for the moment, last June, just because I didn't happen to enjoy it, and I still don't happen to enjoy it, "Ten Little Indians" threw itself into one of the Messrs. Shuberts' higher high-class showshops. And I, poor lone reviewer, was barred for all time from every Shubert attraction. They meant attraction!

Well, I managed to squeeze myself and my opinions into the 46th Street Theatre last evening. There, "Dark of the Moon" was having itself a Shubertian premiere. And "Dark of the Moon" is a Shubert, and I mean Shubert, attraction, and I mean attraction. As a matter of straight-from-the-shoulder writing, it's pretty near perfection.

I wouldn't exactly know what to call "Dark of the Moon." Maybe, going along with them this time, the Messrs. Shubert know a whole lot better than I do. They, right at the top of the program, call it "a legend with music." Okay! Let's go on to tell you that the legend is by Howard Richardson and William Berney, that the music is by Walter Hendl.

The three of them—plus Carol Stone—add up to something fresh and exciting in the contemporary theatre.

Witchcraft

Carol Stone . . .

But, before I go into details about Fred Stone's rolling daughter, permit me to remind you that "Dark of the Moon" has to do with one John, a witch boy in the witch haunted ridges of our own Smoky Mountains. He's a witch, all right, and a son of a witch when it comes to being entangled with as loving a young girl as Miss Stone's Barbara Allen.

When John's not riding on his broomstick, he's pretending to be regular in the Central Square of Buck Creek, or impersonating a human being, hanging around Barbara Allen's cabin up on Chunky Gal Mountain. So fond is he of Barbara that, in the first part of the opening stanza, he calls upon the Conjur Man to turn him into the semblance of a man.

That's his good luck! But it certainly isn't Barbara's. She—wedded to not only a witch, but a son of a witch—gives birth to a monstrosity. And all God's revivalists and all God's revivals can't do anything about the abnormal situation. So, before a year is out, the witch boy goes back to his witchcraft and Barbara goes back to her family.

That, I take it, is a happy ending. At any rate, it's happy for the Barbara Allen who is Fred Stone's daughter, Carol.

Yes, Indeed

Carol Stone . . .

Well, now we've gotten around to her, it is my privilege and my pleasure to tell you that, as Barbara Allen, she is an honor to the family. Seated in front of me was Mrs. Stone, with whom I've been in love for years, and Paula. And the three of us were as happy as a household when, up on the 46th Street Theatre's stage, Carol made Barbara Allen three dimensional.

She's grand, that little lady. She's particularly grand when, seated on a bench during the better part of the piece's revival scene, she just sits and nothing more. I don't know when I've seen as fine a stretch of inactive acting. Small wonder I leaned toward Mrs. Stone and Paula, assuring them that even a drama critic knows a good performance when he sees one.

John, the son of a witch, is in the hands of Richard Hart, a journalist who, at the call of Thespis, decided to work for his living. As a matter of interest, he originated last night's role at the Cambridge, Mass., summer theatre. And, in that stirring revival scene, Roy Fant, my friend out of "Chicken Every Sunday," is himself again . . .

"Dark of the Moon" is a stirring American folk play, the sort of thing the Theatre Guild should be doing. Yes, yes, yes. Then yes again!

"Foolish Notion"

Play by Philip Barry; staging by John C. Wilson; settings by Joe Mielziner; presented by the Theatre Guild at the Martin Beck Theatre, March 13, 1945.

NEW YORK TIMES
March 14, 1945

"Foolish Notion"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

THE chief theatre news this morning is that Tallulah is back, a full half year after the hurricane season, making two of them this year. The chief tragedy to be reported upon this morning is that Tallulah is back only fitfully, she is a disturbance rather than a cyclone. All of the theatre and its friends marched to the Martin Beck last evening to see Tallulah once again bay down a page of history. The auspices were right—the Theatre Guild, a good supporting cast and, in no sense least, Philip Barry's latest play, "Foolish Notion." Disappointment followed. Held down by a script which permitted her to be herself only part of the time, Miss Bankhead the rest of the time was not herself. And Mr. Barry's play was talky, lengthy and obscure. A group of very good players spent most of the evening in a conversational, mystical maze which did not make for the ultimate in theatre entertainment.

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Since Tallulah naturally can do little wrong, let Mr. Barry take most of the blame for the misfortune. His play is part realism, part fantasy. There are occasional moments when the Barry of "Holiday" brightens up the stage, but these are followed by long passages which may be anything from satire to plain purple writing. "Foolish Notion" has one dramatic factor in that it keeps the attention, but it does so in much the same way as a puzzle. The play undoubtedly has a good idea, but in working it out, Mr. Barry has overwritten most scenes which would be far better if simply told. The cast, jumping around from dreams to reality, has a rough time of it; no doubt they, like everyone else, would prefer life had it more of Miss Bankhead's earthy, deep-spoken approach.

THE CAST

Sophie Wing	Tallulah Bankhead
Happy Hapgood	Joan Shepard
Florence Denny	Barbara Kent
Gordon Roark	Donald Cook
Rose	Mildred Dunnock
Horatio Wing	Aubrey Mather
Elsie	Maria Manton
Jim Hapgood	Henry Hull
Flora	Maria Manton
Flora	Barbara Kent
Flora	Mildred Dunnock

Miss Bankhead's role is that of an actress whose writer-husband had gone to Europe some years before, had joined the Army and is believed to be dead. She hopes to marry her leading man, and is about to do so when the husband returns. The second act and the third show how various members of the household imagine the reunion will be, and at the end there is the reunion in reality. The leading man, who had been a friend of the husband, imagines the return as a wise-cracking event; the adopted daughter fancies it in melodrama, with everyone trying to poison or stab her father. The actress plays the scene as though it were from some playwriting tragedy, weeping over the ashes and overacting beautifully. The husband has come back, of course, to say that he is in love with someone else.

* * *

When the situations allow her scope, Miss Bankhead is her wonderful self. On a line of sarcasm, her voice drops from her shoulders to her boots, and with an inflection she can prick any pompous bubble in the neighborhood. Unfortunately a fair number of bubbles are allowed to soar, and Miss Bankhead is left standing politely where she should be told to scream the house down. Donald Cook is the leading man, not making that figure a creature of any great strength, giving him pettishness rather than firm character. Henry Hull has the difficult job of the evening; in the dream sections he ranges from a Scottish soldier through a drunken writer to the owner of trained seals. Joan Shepard, a lady of 12, plays the daughter and does it very well indeed, dodging the mannerisms of child actresses and making a real person. The scene in which she imagines her father's return is the best of the play. Aubrey Mather is the father.

Several times during the play Mr. Barry remarks that by saying something you get rid of the fear of it. Now that "Foolish Notion" is off his mind, both he and Tallulah should get on to something better.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
March 14, 1945

Saved by Tallulah

By HOWARD BARNES

TALLULAH BANKHEAD works valiantly to illuminate a murky script in "Foolish Notion." Never has she been more assured, versatile and properly exhibitionistic than she is in the new Philip Barry play at the Martin Beck Theater. It is well that she is. For Barry has contrived a fantasy where he might have composed one. There are scenes in his Henry Jamesian contemplation of human relationships which have a witty bite, backed up by emotional power. Too often the work is brittle, adolescent and pretentious.

* * *

Only Miss Bankhead, I think, could have made so many of his rag-tag, bob-tail notions about life, love, truth and beauty stand up in a dramatic structure. As the central character of a fable which confronts a "personality" actress with a husband who had been legally declared dead, a man she is about to marry, an adopted daughter and the girl whom the husband really loves, she is serene and magnificent. The scenes forsake her, as they shuttle back and forth between fancy and fact. She never forsakes a scene. Her performance is a veritable triumph of the season.

Barry takes his cue, rather obviously, from Robert Burns's tribute to a louse on a lady's bonnet, with its well known line, "To see ourseis as ithers see us." The return of the husband is seen in anticipation through several pairs of eyes and several hearts. The ham-actor father-in-law of the Enoch Arden, the imminent husband of the actress, the adopted kid and the actress herself vary the scene with comic and melodramatic effects as it takes place several times on the stage. It is tricky, sophisticated and sometimes entertaining play-writing. It rarely touches the heart. "The Turn of the Screw" worked the same device far more brilliantly and with a fund of meaning which is almost always wanting in this Theater Guild production.

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If it were not for the star, "Foolish Notion" would be a rather lamentable tour-de-force. As it is, she brings such radiance and feeling to the part of the tortured woman who has made a compact with destiny and has to make it all over again, that the piece has genuine fascination. Her voice alone underlines the switch from fantasy to reality which is forever occuring in the action. Her impeccable acting makes the very most of not too funny lines. Henry Hull plays the returned soldier with considerable authority. Donald Cook struggles rather unhappily with the hapless role of the new man in the actress's life and Aubrey Mather is pleasantly breezy as the old codger. Then there are Joan Shepard, doing a very good job as the youngster, and Barbara Kent and Mildred Dunnock to give the comedy dimensions which are not to be found in the writing. John C. Wilson's staging and the Jo Mielziner setting are fine. The really fine thing about "Foolish Notion" is Tallulah Bankhead.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
March 14, 1945

Everybody Has a High Old Time in Miss Bankhead's 'Foolish Notion'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"FOOLISH NOTION," which the Theatre Guild presented last night at the Martin Beck, is the most theatrical play of this season or last. Philip Barry was play-acting when he wrote it—reveling in turns of phrase, passages ranging from brittle to purple, puns like "Sufficient unto the day is the upheaval thereof."

Barry wrote it for play-actors, and Miss Helburn and Mr. Langner of the Guild went and got him some—Tallulah Bankhead, Donald Cook and Henry Hull. The play-actors in their turn have one gaudy, lovely time play-acting in it.

The result was that on the whole I had an almost perfectly grand evening. I did wish, though, that Mr. Barry could have brought off a better ending; somehow "Foolish Notion" came to a stop a little before it stopped—but up to then I was happy to let everybody run wild in a nice, high-class way.

Practically everybody involved has a chance to play at least two characters—a real self and an imagined self. Mr. Barry gave himself the fattest role by writing like Barry, Noel Coward, Bernard Shaw and maybe A. A. Milne. All of his characters are purely fictional and any resemblance to real persons would be an astonishing coincidence.

A Widow Under the Law

The characters are, mainly, an actress (Miss Bankhead), an actor (Mr. Cook) and a writer (Mr. Hull) who has disappeared in the war and is legally dead. Mr. Hull and Miss Bankhead were married, but now, having been declared a widow by a court, she is about to wed her leading man.

Then Mr. Hull turns up. Not immediately, though; everybody gets a hunch that he is back among the living and has a couple of hours to imagine how he will take it—how he will manage to readjust his own life. They all sit in Mr. Hull's house and look at a painting of him and go into a day-dream in which he returns.

To Mr. Cook he comes back as the same old charming sot he always was—and Mr. Cook loses out because Miss Bankhead's motherly instinct is aroused. To a small adopted daughter who adores him he returns as the adorable man which he is—but one whose life is now in danger. In fact, Daddy gets done in just like in a children's radio serials.

To Miss Bankhead's father (Aubrey Mather) Mr. Hull returns as a heroic Scot. To Miss Bankhead herself he comes back in a silver urn—the ashes of a war hero.

Finally, Reality

All of this is very enjoyable hooey in which every advantage is taken of exaggeration. Finally Mr. Hull, himself, does come home—and then it's up to everybody, including Playwright Barry, to figure out what really is going to happen. Mr. Barry did not lick that problem to my satisfaction.

The title of the comedy comes from Robert Burns' "O wad some power the giftie gie us to see ourseis as ithers see us." Mr. Barry pretends that each imagined event produces a real change in attitude on the part of the person who dreamed it. But if I were you I wouldn't let it get me down.

All of the players are good fun, reliabing their varying moods, and Miss Bankhead is as always a woman of vivid, disturbing charm and sharp, sure humor. Joan Shepard plays the adopted child admirably, and Marlene Dietrich's daughter, Maria Manton, is among those who have minor roles.

The set is by Jo Mielziner and it is mighty fine to look upon a Mielziner set again. This one is a deft trick which permits the audience as well as the players to look at the "fourth wall." John C. Wilson directed and has made everything look slick.

NEW YORK POST
March 14, 1945

'Foolish Notion' Has Good Wisecracks and Tallulah

By WILELLA WALDORF

PHILIP BARRY'S new play, "Foolish Notion," produced by the Theatre Guild last night at the Martin Beck, has a delightful first act full of giddily amusing witticisms, many of them apparently written with Tallulah Bankhead in mind. Since Miss Bankhead is present—in the flesh and a series of Mainbocher gowns—to lob them over the footlights in her best style, we spent the first intermission wondering if perhaps "Foolish Notion" might not turn out to be Mr. Barry's best dramatic effort in some little time.

What followed, however, was only a series of charades, occasionally effective, sometimes humorous, but on the whole empty and tediously repetitious. Even Miss Bankhead's best efforts seemed wasted on much of it, and there were times when she was absent from the stage far too long, especially in the second act. During these intervals, the conversation in the Bankhead dressing room was probably a good deal more entertaining than what was taking place on the stage.

A Warrior's Return

Mr. Barry introduces a celebrated acting team—Miss Bankhead and Donald Cook—who would like to team up offstage as well as on. The actress, however, has a husband who went abroad in 1939, joined up with the Gordon Highlanders and has been missing for years. Finally she has him declared legally dead and is about to marry her leading man when a strange telephone call announces his imminent return.

While they are waiting around for his arrival, various members of the household dream their own versions of what he will look like, how he will act and what will happen in the end. Thus Henry Hull, who plays the husband, keeps coming back in one dream after another, in and out of uniform, drunk and sober, or merely as ashes in an urn, until his genuine return at the end of the third act seems very tame indeed.

Since nobody's dream is destined to come true, the least Mr. Barry could have done was to bring Mr. Hull on for the finale by parachute or leading a tank battalion, thus topping them all. But even at that it would be hard to care very much whether he actually arrived or not.

Some of the dreams have their amusing moments, and Miss Bankhead is permitted to go gay now and then in her own inimitable fashion, but after the first act "Foolish Notion" stops being a play and merely indulges in a series of antics that never develop sustained interest and are even on occasion downright trying.

Fortunately, even a little bit of Tallulah in her best form is enough to entertain this department enormously, and so we found Mr. Barry's whimsey pleasant enough despite its faults whenever she was carrying on, aided by Donald Cook, Aubrey Mather and a child named Joan Shepard, who's a very taking little thing altogether. Of Mr. Hull's numerous returns from the wars, by far the best was the little girl's dream of Daddy in a lavishly decorated Marine uniform narrowly escaping murder at the hands of Mr. Cook.

Somewhere in the melee there is time out for a brief sketch apparently especially designed for Maria Manton, whose mother is Marlene Dietrich. The production is elegantly designed by Jo Mielziner (another lately returned from the wars) and directed by John C. Wilson for all there is in it. The more we think it over the less there seems to be in it,but there's always Tallulah, plus some merry cracks, especially in that good first act.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
March 14, 1945

'Foolish Notion' Apparently Was

By BURTON RASCOE

PHILIP BARRY'S "Foolish Notion," starring Tallulah Bankhead, which opened at the Martin Beck last night, is so smart, so brilliant, so clever that I haven't the slightest idea what it is about and I was bored stiff by it. It is not even in any language I have ever learned. It must be a language Mr. Barry and Tallulah use among themselves.

You must be very rich to use such language; for I never saw such a drawing room as this show opens up into. Everything is very elegant about the place; but it has a feature I am sure you never before saw in your life; when you turn on a light a portrait of some old fellow lights up behind a gauze screen. Why? Ask Mr. Barry, not me? He is full of subtleties, that chap, and he may answer you by having an unbearable kid run out, in a nightgown screeching:

"O wad some power the Giftie gie us
To see ourseis as ithers see us,
It wad frae monie a blunder free us,
An' foolish notion."

That's all supposed to be very funny. But nobody laughed last night even when there was something about a Highlander, who was killed in this war, but shows up to make a mockery of the wedding of Miss Bankhead with Donald Cook.

I love children, but may I ask to be excused from such representations of them as the girl-child in this awful play is required to exhibit? And will Maria Manton, please stop screaming so loud?

NEW YORK SUN
March 14, 1945

Miss Bankhead's Acting Better Than Her Play, Which Is 'Foolish Notion'

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE dauntless Tallulah Bankhead, who has somehow picked up the art of acting as she has gone her cyclonic way, returned to the New York stage last night to give her undiminished vitality to Philip Barry's "Foolish Notion," handsomely produced at the Martin Beck by the Theatre Guild.

"Foolish Notion" does not show Mr. Barry at his best. It is more of a notion than a play.

It is a prank, a whimsy, a caprice, and for all its gloss and glibness it provides a somewhat unsatisfying evening in the theater.

Mr. Barry, making the point that anticipation can be far more unsettling than actuality, has combined realism with fantasy and the blend is not particularly successful. I could have taken more play and less fantasy and would have welcomed more of Miss Bankhead in sustained moods. The evening is hers, however, and her performance is far superior to the play.

In "Foolish Notion," a title out of Robert Burns, the author presents the case of Sophie Wing, a brooding, brilliant and tempestuous actress who is planning to marry her acting partner and go on a South American tour. Five years before, back in 1939, her husband, Jim Hapgood, joined up with a Scottish regiment, the Ladies From Hell. He has been reported missing, is thought to be dead, and has been legally declared so. But as Sophie and her co-star are preparing for flight word comes that Jim is back, and Jim is given to whimsy on his own account. That's the first act, which is the best of the three.

In the second act Mr. Barry turns to fantasy and "Foolish Notion" flounders. The home-coming of Jim is shown as it is imagined by Gordon, the lover; by Sophie's waggish professor-father, by Sophie's adopted child, and finally by Sophie herself. Jim, in these sequences, comes forth in civilian clothes, as a member of the Scottish Highlanders, as a glorified Marine and finally as ashes in an urn. The second half of the final act is again according to fact and Jim's actual return is far easier on all concerned than they had thought it would be.

Miss Bankhead plays a series of roles. She is humorous, she is emotional, she is brittle, she is maternal. She is called upon to play comedy and tragedy and whimsy, and there is never enough of one thing or the other. But the pride of Jasper, Ala., is fascinating throughout and gives just another reminder, if it be needed, that she has come a long way as an actress.

Henry Hull is quite ingratiating as Sophie's writer-husband, who walked out on her and stayed away five years. Donald Cook, a precise and forceful actor, makes Mr. Barry's points with a lot of emphasis and occasionally too much. Joan Shepard is extraordinarily good as the child. Barbara Kent, playing the girl who means much in Jim's life, has spirit and charm. Aubrey Mather gives geniality to an oddly written role. Mildred Dunnock is excellent in her third-act scene.

"Foolish Notion" has been produced with extreme good taste. Jo Mielziner, back to his trade, has provided a fetching living room. John C. Wilson has staged the play with skill. Philip Barry has written some sharp dialogue, along with much that is labored. His fantasy sequences become occasionally tiresome, and I wish he had developed his Enoch Arden theme as a straight play. "Foolish Notion" leaves you with the feeling of having been let down.

But, even so, Miss Bankhead may put it over. She is really quite overpowering.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
March 14, 1945

Tallulah Bankhead In "Foolish Notion"

By ROBERT GARLAND

LAST NIGHT, at the Martin Beck Theatre, there was a tremendous disappointment. I was all upset about Tallulah Bankhead. She should have been better. As a matter of fact, she was a whole lot better than the play. And the play was Philip Barry's "Foolish Notion." And "Foolish Notion," in turn, is from Bobby Burns' poem, entitled "To a Louse—On Seeing One Upon a Lady's Bonnet in Church."

To be blunt about it, the new arrival at the Martin Beck Theater just isn't any play at all. Writing frankly, I don't think Tallulah Bankhead or Henry Hull, or even Robert Burns knows what they're talking about. Or don't they seem to care? The real trouble is the fact that nobody really believes in it.

From the moment Tallulah, who is my and everybody else's favorite actress, appears on the stage, until the final curtain falls, she never seems to care whether she is a real person or not. Never since she played around with a Mr. Shakespeare's "Cleopatra" has she done as bad a job.

She didn't believe in Cleopatra and, for my part, she doesn't believe in Philip Barry's Sophie Wing. She keeps on kidding her . . .

Past, Present, Future

The story, as much sense as I can make of it, is about a celebrated actress who can't make up her mind whether she wants to marry her past, her present, or her future. Everybody on the stage of the Martin Beck Theatre wants to marry her. Myself included. But nobody seems to be able to get around to doing so. But, if my memory doesn't fool me, Donald Cook is the most persistent.

Act by act, and scene by scene, Donald puts the idea to her. According to the playwright's notion, Donald is the boy she should take a notion to. But, perverse as she is, she doesn't. Instead, she fools around with her old "dead" husband, and his name, I think is Jim.

It all adds up to a curiously uneven evening. Spies from the hinterland reported upon its excellence, but in "Foolish Notion," Philip Barry has written a play which is neither good comedy, good humor, nor good outstanding melodrama.

As far as I can relate, last night's arrival at the Martin Beck Theatre isn't any good anything. It should be, heaven knows. But it isn't.

Can Do No Wrong

Right about here, I break down and confess that if Tallulah Bankhead came out on the stage and reread the N. Y. Telephone directory, I would think she was wonderful. Tallulah does that to me, and, I hope, even after having seen her at her worst, as Cleopatra, she is my favorite actress. To me, she can do no wrong.

But she strains my devotion just a bit as the Sophie Wing of Philip Barry's "Foolish Notion." In the quotation from which the title is taken, Sophie Wing is "a louse on a lady's bonnet." And, as far as I am concerned, Miss Bankhead can take her hat off any time she has a mind to.

Whisper it not around Longacre Square, but Tallulah goes a wee bit ham on her customers.

Speaking of ham, Henry Hull is wonderful as Jim Hapgood, one of Tallulah's "here-he-is-and-here-he-isn't" husbands. If I were Tallulah, which certainly is none of my business, I wouldn't let Henry come in my own front door. But Tallulah does. And, because of her inconsistency, she doesn't seem to cotton to him, as much as she should.

He, in turn, is nothing to cotton to. Unless, like me, you happen to be very fond of ham.

Tallulah Bankhead, the star, was not at her best. Philip Barry, the playwright, was not at his best, either. And the Theatre Guild, bringing the two together, could have done a whole lot better with another star and another playwright.

Designed and lighted by Jo Mielziner; costumed, as far as Miss Bankhead is concerned, by Mainbocher, and produced under the supervision of Armina Marshall, "Foolish Notion" should run forever. But not with my permission.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
March 14, 1945

Miss Bankhead Is Not Enough

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THE good angel who presided over Philip Barry's birth wore impeccably creased striped trousers, and blessed the little lad with a gift for rather brittle comedy and an insight into manners. The bad angel was a lady who wore her wings a little askew and had a burning desire to juggle time and space like colored balls. She it was, I fear, who burdened the little tyke with an itch to go bounding off into mysticism, symbolism, allegory and fantasy. Well into maturity Mr. Barry kept that itch in check, but at last it got too much for him; and for some years now, with occasional respites, the good and bad angel have been fighting it out in Mr. Barry's plays.

They are fighting it out again in *Foolish Notion*, which came to the Martin Beck Tuesday night, starring Tallulah Bankhead. *Foolish Notion* is a drawing-room play framed in fantasy—though it is fantasy with a difference. Mr. Barry is in a mood, this time, to be only mildly serious about his will-o-the-wisps, and to turn the lights low for satire and even considerable spoofing. The episodes that occur out of time are not really—in terms of the drawing-room milieu—out of place there; they harbor a workable idea and allow for a good deal of development. The trouble is that all too often they seem woefully contrived and tediously labored. The lady with the wings has no empyreal aspirations in *Foolish Notion;* but she is still Mr. Barry's bad angel, and she does him dirt.

Foolish Notion tells of a famous actress whose husband went to England and enlisted when the war broke out in 1939, was shortly after reported missing, and after five years has been declared legally dead. Now the actress is about to remarry, but on the very eve of the wedding the husband is found to be alive, and is indeed on his way to the very handsome Jo Mielziner drawing-room in which the action takes place. But before he actually arrives (here comes the fantasy) the prospective bridegroom, the actress's father, the actress's little daughter and finally the actress herself have visions of what his return will be like. Each scene, of course, grows out of the character and imagination of the one who dreams it up. There is a chance here to project a good deal of psychological reality; there is equally a chance to have some fun. Mr. Barry's mistake lies in going in for something of both, for real emotions and the cliches of emotion. He is most serious (though quite shallow) with the little girl; most satiric with the actress, a lady given to absurd posturing and self-dramatizations. (Throughout the play, indeed, Mr. Barry is having his joke at the acting profession.) Out of his fantasy scenes he gets some quite amusing moments, but the scenes in general are heavy-handed, strained and over-literary. And when the husband really turns up, the play trails off to a feeble and mechanical curtain. The best act, indeed, is the straight drawing-room first one; it has the most flow and the liveliest dialogue, though even so there is far less cut-and-thrust, sparkle and sheen, than there should be.

• • •

Foolish Notion is, at any rate, the most cultured play of the season—virtually a seminar in English literature. Strewn through it are bits of Scripture, Shakespeare, W. S. Gilbert, Whitman, Sir Walter Scott, Socrates, Milton, John Webster, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Rostand, Robert Burns (who also helped with the title), E. B. White, Ernest Dowson, and a couple of other names I jotted down in the dark and can no longer identify. However, useful for *us*, all this is usually a bad sign in a creative work, and is no exception in this one. *Foolish Notion*, despite its lively moments, is a pretty dead play.

Miss Bankhead does all she can to pump life into it, and has her fine termigant and capital comedy moments. But her role lacks fullness and continuity, and she can only send out passing sparks, not kindle a steady blaze. Mr. Wilson's direction is also a hindrance; it has an emphatic, loud-pedal quality unsuited to the drawing-room style, and even rather blatant for the burlesque episodes. It makes Donald Cook monotonous and ineffective as the bridegroom-to-be; it makes Henry Hull a little wooden as the husband, whether phantasmagoric or real; and it robs Aubrey Mather of much of his engaging English casualness. But the overdone direction may well be an attempt to cover up an underdone play.

Now Available **Motion Picture Critic's Reviews**

"It's a Gift"

Comedy by Curt Goetz and Dorian Otvos; staging by Robert Henderson; settings by Samuel Leve; presented by the Goval Corporation at the Playhouse Theatre, March 12, 1945.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
March 13, 1945

Hippopotamus on Skates

By HOWARD BARNES

THE new comedy at the Playhouse is like a hippopotamus on roller skates. It has a certain ponderous momentum. It is shy on levity. Curt Goetz and Dorian Otvos have tried to build a play around a situation in "It's a Gift." Since the situation tempts a father to have his eldest daughter bear an illegitimate child in order to receive a legacy, it is not particularly surprising that the show itself merely moves around the stage without getting anywhere. Add to that a series of heavy-handed characterizations, and you may gather that Broadway's newcomer is no boon to the Easter season.

There is a pungent line in the final act of the piece which sums it up succinctly. The harassed patriarch, disappointed by the false news that he is going to have a bastard grandchild shouts: "What next?" He took the line away from the audience. For "It's a Gift" puffs around from Hazelton, Pa., to Montevideo, Uruguay and back again with such humorous accents as having a pastor think an orphanage is a house of joy and the mother of twelve children insist on a little folding money before she continues her career.

Goetz and his wife, Valerie Van Martens, who are described in the program as Swiss subjects, have the chief acting to do in the offering. The former plays the martinet head of an extensive family circa 1911 with the same bludgeoning emphasis that he has contrived in the lines of the "sentimental comedy." Miss Van Martens, on the other hand, brings a warmth and restraint to the mama role which deserved better material.

The others in what you may have guessed is a rather large company do very little to help the proceedings. Julie Harris and Michael Strong blunder through the romantic nonsense; Whitford Kane takes something of a beating as the pastor; Suzanne Caubaye works over-hard as the supervisor of the Uruguayan orphanage, who has to suggest that the home for girls is something more than that, and a lot of youngsters come on stage occasionally to jump up and down and make a racket. "It's a Gift" is no gift to the theater, anyway you look at it.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
March 13, 1945

'It's a Gift' Is a Modest Bargain In a Hard and Demanding World

By JOHN CHAPMAN

THE new comedy at the Playhouse, "It's a Gift," has charm, for its humor, though not uproarious, is intelligent, and it is interestingly played by a picklepuss actor from Europe named Curt Goetz; but I doubt that it is robust enough to make its way in the Broadway theatre of today.

Its plot, I would say, is farcical and might make a movie or a musical comedy; but it is written and played for character and this slows it down and thins it out. I soon learned not to wonder what was going to happen next, for I either guessed ahead of time what was going to happen or I felt that what might come off wouldn't be such a much, anyway.

The only resort, then, was to enjoy some of the sharp, neat lines and the neat, sharp way Mr. Goetz dropped them. (With the help of one Dorian Otvos he wrote "It's a Gift" for himself and gave his wife a part in it, too.) Even Mr. Goetz' lemonish, dead-pan delivery wore a bit thin, for I could count on it, too, ahead of time.

THE CAST

Prof. Theodore W. Herrmann	Curt Goetz
Matilda Herrmann	Valerie Van Martens
Atlanta	Julie Harris
Thomas	Robert Muscat
Peter	David Green
Lewis	Roland Green
Ursula	Sally Ferguson
Otto	William Kinney
Evelyn	Yvonne Pothen
Dan	Victor Vras
Sophie	Winnie Mae Martin
Elsie	Joan Gordon
Sandy	Kevin Mathews
Finnie	Evelyn Daly
Emily	Hilda Laufkoetter
Rev. Endicott	Whitford Kane
Herbert Kraft	Michael Strong
Mayor Doubleday	G. Swayne Gordon
Belinda	Marjorie Peterson
Madame de la Jardinerre	Suzanne Caubaye
Rosita	Elaine Carter
Chiquita	Hope Miller
Lupe	Doris Brent
Dolores	Elsa Johnson
Mr. Flynn	Morton DaCosta

One of Those Wills

In Pennsylvania, according to the story, there is a professor with twelve children and a placid wife who enjoys one week's rest a year in a maternity hospital. He is a man of furious discipline, who long ago had banished his sister from the rigors of the family fold because she had a baby but no husband.

The sister goes to Uruguay, finally dies and names the professor's eldest daughter in her will. (Sis did all right in Uruguay.) Daughter gets a small piece of property—but if she, or any other female of the prof's tribe, should have an illegitimate child, she will inherit a whopping fortune.

This, of course, is a made-up plot, and it has a made-up solution.

There are some gently humorous scenes of family life, with all twelve children on the stage and the professor being despotically benevolent. Mrs. Goetz (Valerie Van Martens) plays the placid wife placidly, and Whitford Kane is present as a priest who is a friend of the tribe.

Marjorie Peterson and Suzanne Caubaye appear for a while as a couple of Uruguayans. Julie Harris plays the eldest daughter and Michael Strong her dumb young fiance.

The two sets are nicely conceived by Samuel Leve. Robert Henderson directed with a tendency to make people play for time rather than fun.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
March 13, 1945

'It's a Gift' Is a Gift of Bright, Light Comedy

By BURTON RASCOE

"IT'S A GIFT" by Curt Goetz and Dorian Otvos, which opened at the Playhouse last night, is an utterly delightful comedy which I could see over and over again with pleasure perhaps a dozen times. It is incredible and fantastic; it is illogical and outside your own experience; and yet everything about it is so true to human nature that you just love it. At least I did; and the audience seemed to concur; they were hilarious throughout the evening.

This is a comedy that has quality. It touches your emotions almost not at all. It appeals to your brain rather than to your heart, and to that cynicism that lies within your own breast, even though you are (as this comedy professes to be) sentimental. It is a reductio ad absurdum of conventional morality and something G. Bernard Shaw might have thought of but, so moral and conventional is he, never did.

The story tells of the legacy of Prof. Theodore W. Herrmann (Curt Goetz) and how it plagued him and won its happy vengeance upon him. The professor is a rock of respectability; he has a wife and 12 kids, and he has never looked at another woman; he has stern concepts of righteousness, morality, self-respect and independence. He had cut a sister out of his life because she once offended against the moral law and had borne a child without benefit of clergy.

Wealthy Sister's Bequest

The sister had prospered and grown wealthy. Moreover, she had conceived a deep sentimental concern for all those who are unfortunate enough to have been born out of wedlock and had established homes for all such all over the world.

Much against his conscience, Prof. Herrmann (formerly of Hazeltown, Pa.) finds himself the legatee and inmate of what looks to him like a bawdy house in Montevideo, Uruguay, and with a wife and kids installed therein, none of them seeming to see anything improper about the whole thing. . . . It was a bawdy house, originally, but his deceased sister had taken it over and pensioned the inmates so they didn't have to be immoral any more; now it's perfectly pure.

Then there's a codicil in this wealthy sister's will, which will give $750,000 to Prof. Herrmann in cash outright if it can be shown that he or any of his children came under the illegitimacy act. He is about to lose the $750,000 when his wife discloses that, although they now have 12 children, they were married on a ferryboat and the skipper had no right to pronounce them man and wife.

Strange People

No! You can't identify yourself very easily with Prof. Herrmann or anybody else in the play—not as you can with the people, say in "Life With Father" or "I Remember Mama," but here is a comedy so amusing about the sort of people you don't know very well that you wish you knew them and feel you could love them.

NEW YORK SUN
March 13, 1945

'It's a Gift,' Naive and Raucous Comedy, Is Presented at the Playhouse

By WARD MOREHOUSE

I AGAIN HAD SEATS B-1 and 3 at the Playhouse last night and things were about as usual. The reviewer with the cane was just behind me and the critic who sees all performances with an unlighted cigarette between his lips was to the left of me and there in Row AA serenely sat Mrs. Katzenberg and upon the stage was "It's a Gift," which wasn't very good.

But don't give up hope. The Playhouse has another one on the way, "The Glass Menagerie," and the tidings from the West are pleasant indeed.

"It's a Gift" is a naive and raucous comedy with some amusing interludes, written by Curt Goetz and Dorian Otvos and brought in under nameless sponsorship. Mr. Goetz, besides his co-authorship, is also the leading player. A Swiss subject, Mr. Goetz is a strutting and declamatory actor and there are moments when he appears about ready to break away from the script and address the audience. But he has an excellent sense of timing and his performance as a struggling biology professor and father of a brood of twelve is frequently downright funny.

The Goetz-Otvos comedy brings a swarm of children to the stage of the Playhouse and brings along the story of the Professor's sister who was banished by him because of unmarried motherhood and who dies leaving a bequest of $750,000 for the Professor's 17-year-old daughter, Atlanta, on condition that she give birth to an illegitimate child before her eighteenth birthday. This places the Professor in quite a dilemma, he being in dire need of funds, but in "It's a Gift" they get

around it and without the young and pretty Atlanta having to oblige.

The time of this comedy is 1911, the scenes are in Hazleton, Pa., and Montevideo, Uruguay, to which the Professor and daughter have to go in accordance with terms of the sister's will. But in Act Three they're back in Hazleton and there the comedy is resolved.

The role of the daughter is pleasantly played by Julie Harris. Valerie Van Martens (Mrs. Goetz), who appeared in her husband's European productions, is making her debut on the stage of this country and she is very natural and frequently affecting. Whitford Kane gives his familiar performance as the jovial Rev. Endicott, who goes along with the fortune-seeking professor to the banks of the mighty Rio de La Plata.

"It's a Gift," which opened cold last night, is a friendly little play, funny in spots, but ambling and slapstick for most of the way, and it has all appearances of being another Broadway transient.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
March 13, 1945

'It's a Gift' Opens At the Playhouse

By ROBERT GARLAND

NO MORE will I pull the venerable wheeze about "where there's a will there's a play." With last night's arrival at the Playhouse unhappily in mind, it doesn't happen to be true. There's a will in "It's a Gift," all right. But there isn't any play. Sub-titled "a sentimental comedy," it's neither more nor less than a double entendre talk-fest.

Curt Goetz and Dorian Otvos, refugees from Hollywood, are said to have whipped it up three years ago betwen them. Mr. Goetz is a veteran in such matters. Somewhere in Europe, he already has turned out five comedies, 12 one-acters, one operetta.

Just who's actually responsible for the production of "It's a Gift" is a secret insofar as programs are concerned. It doesn't matter. What does matter is that a lot of good money and a lot of bad actors have been spent on an unamusing conversation-piece. At best, it's a cockeyed combination of "Life With Father," "Three's a Family" and "Early to Bed."

Robert Henderson, of Ann Arbor fame, is responsible for the staging. Samuel Leve, graduate of the Federal Theatre Project, is responsible for the settings. But who was responsible for last night's misguided congregation, I've no idea. That audience adored it.

Happy Curtain

The story of "It's a Gift" is of such stuff as theatrical censorship is made. It's not a good story. It's not a clean story. And, being neither first-rate nor immaculate, it isn't even funny. Starting out in Hazelton, Pa., it moves on to Montevideo, Uruguay, and returns at last to Hazelton. Montevideo is where most of the double entendre occurs.

It's Prof. Theodore Herrmann of Hazelton who is affected by the will. His long-lost sister, a good little bad girl, has died and left him I-forget-how-many hundred thousand dollars. But with a string tied to them. This string is what leads him all the way to Montevideo.

It's the old and "Early-to-Bed"-ish case of mistaken identity. That is, of mistaking a respectable young ladies' seminary for a different kind of female institution. They did it in reverse two years ago at the Broadhurst. Only they did it with music. And songs. And dancing. Maybe music, songs and dancing are what last night's mishap needs. It needs something. It needs it badly.

Be that as it may, Prof. Herrmann gets his money and everything turns out for the best in the most incredible of all possible worlds. The final curtain falls on a scene of homey happiness. To my way of thinking, any final curtain falling on "It's a Gift" would be a happy one.

Books Come High

Our professor from Pennsylvania is the father of a dozen children—Atlanta, Thomas, Peter, Louis, Ursula, Otto, Evelyn, Dan, Sophie, Elsie, Sandy and Finnie. Reading from left to right their ages range from 17 to four. Reading from right to left, they're a pretty brat-ish group of offspring. With nothing much to do, I passed the evening wondering how even their mamma and their papa could abide them.

One of the authors, Curt Goetz, has cast himself as the prolific professor. Mr. Goetz is undoubtedly a comedian of parts. Especially has he a flair for timing. But his mannerisms, his accent and his role get together and gang up on him. Especially his obstructive accent.

His wife, Valerie Van Martens is seen—if not always heard—as Matilda Herrmann, his on-stage missus. She is sweet and personable. But she, too, is defeated by her accent, and her role. Whitford Kane deals gently with a Pennsylvania reverend. It's a pleasure to see Mr. Kane without one foot in Ophelia's grave. Suzanne Caubaye gives them the works as one Madame de la Jardinerre.

The direction of Robert Henderson is as so-so as the play. The settings by Samuel Leve are colorful, especially the scene in Uruguay. But, for the life of me, I can't understand why Prof. and Mrs. Herrmann keep their books up on the ceiling. Could they have gotten their hands on them, maybe there wouldn't have been so many children.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
March 13, 1945

A New Way to Inherit Dough

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

AT the Playhouse—where any night you will find a show opening unless you find one closing—the new bill is titled *It's a Gift*, and subtitled "a sentimental comedy." The subtitle is undoubtedly in deference to Act I, which mirrors the home life of highly moral Professor Herman, his devoted wife Matilda, and their 12 obedient children. Acts II and III are considerably less idyllic, however—the Double-Entendre having snuck in during the first intermission and taken complete possession of the plot, the dialogue, the humor and anything else that is part of the show. I found the whole thing—barring about four funny lines—puerile, vulgar and tiresome.

It seems that about 20 years before the curtain went up the Professor kicked his sister Josephine out of the family because she had produced a love child. Now she has died wealthy in Montevideo, and left the Professor's eldest daughter Atlanta a legacy. The Professor, Atlanta and—for some reason—the local minister take boat to Uruguay and there are led to think that Josie made her fortune operating a chain of brothels. The first flock of double meanings litters the stage till it transpires that Jo was actually a famous singer, and the brothels are homes for unprotected girls.

Next the Professor learns confidentially about Josie's will: her fortune goes to the aforesaid unprotected girls unless somebody in the Professor's family has an illegitimate child by a certain date, in which case it goes to her. As the highly moral Professor also happens to be highly mercenary, and as there is just time for Atlanta to cop the sweepstakes, Pop is in a dither. Now the double meanings fly like feathers in a henroop during a high wind—though naturally home life hasn't quite as much tone as it possessed in Act I. The idea of a father secretly trying for financial reasons to get his 17-year-old daughter with child is, I confess, a novel comedy idea; it could also be a slightly nauseous one. However, I hasten to add that virtue triumphs even if taste takes a beating.

Curt Goetz, one of the two authors of this edifying work, is also the chief performer in it, playing the Professor. He is a much better actor than playwright, having indeed a good deal of comedy skill in the Continental manner. Valerie Van Martens, his wife both on and off the stage, also performs competently; Julie Harris makes a pretty Atlanta; Michael Strong does well enough as her dopey swain; and Whitford Kane is the padre.

NEW YORK TIMES
March 13, 1945

'Timeo Danaos'

By LEWIS NICHOLS

CURT GOETZ and Dorian Otvos call "It's a Gift" a sentimental comedy. Perhaps so. Among the members of their acting company are twelve child players, and no doubt a dozen minor dependents generally are warming in this, the income-tax, week. But a sentimental comedy could stand some feeling as well, it could be composed of lines spoken by good citizens more nearly approaching human beings. In the Playhouse's present tenant, the Messrs. Goetz and Otvos have set up a series of situations to be met mainly with words of double or triple meanings. Brittle comedies sometimes can be written that way, not sentimental comedies. The present case is neither one of these, nor is it good.

The household under discussion is that of Professor Herrmann, his wife and their twelve children. Back in his salad days, the professor had flung his sister from the house because of a moral lapse; in far-off South America, she dies and leaves certain monies to his eldest daughter. Going down there to find out about it, the professor and the clergyman who accompanies him first think the sister had been a keeper of unorthodox houses, then they find she had been a singer. (Double meanings throughout here.) Then it is determined that the daughter will receive no money unless some member of the professor's family also makes a carnal error. The sentimental side of the comedy goes into full sweep when the professor hints that he wouldn't mind if his daughter had the first baby before the marriage service.

Mr. Goetz is the leading player, and the guess last evening was that if someone else wrote his comedies he might be fun to have around. He has some of the dead-pan mannerisms of Melville Cooper with, of all things, a minor Bert Lahr laugh. Even in so bad a matter as "It's a Gift" he manages to give an amusing second or so. The rest of the company is defeated by the circumstances set up by the authors. Valerie van Martens, who in private life is Mrs. Goetz, is the professor's wife; the daughter is played by Julie Harris; the clergyman by Whitford Kane. Mr. Kane always is pleasant to see, even though the role, as in this case, is a sloppy one. The child actors are of all sizes and shapes and of both sexes, and make a noisy if not real family. "It's a Gift," however, had better be sent back for exchange.

NEW YORK MOTION PICTURE
CRITICS' REVIEWS
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"Calico Wedding"

Comedy by Sheridan Gibney; staging by Mr. Gibney; settings by Frederick Fox; presented by Lester Meyer and Richard Myers at the National Theatre, March 7, 1945.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
March 8, 1945

'Calico Wedding' Spotty Comedy—And All of Its Spots Are Low

By JOHN CHAPMAN

ANY bankrupt motorist knows these days that an inner tube is good just so long as it stays pumped up. Any playwright should know any day that a pumped-up comedy is good only so long as it remains inflated—and God help the play if humor leaks out faster than the author can ram more humor in.

Sherian Gibney's "Calico Wedding," presented last night at the National Theatre, is as leaky as a columnist's Washington source of information. It deflates itself in spite of the huffing and puffing of the author (Mr. Gibney), the director (Mr. Gibney) and the three principal players.

The principals are Grete Mosheim and William Post, who play a wife and husband celebrating their second, or calico, anniversary, and Louis Jean Heydt, who portrays an elderly Rover Boy from the North Pole.

An Old, Old Yarn

The plot is brief: Wife is eager but hubby is bored. Wife gets stewed with the bashful explorer and certain indelicacies may have occurred. Hubby thereupon gets jealous and his ardor is reawakened.

Mr. Gibney wrote this play quite a few years ago, but has tried to make it look new by giving it a prologue set in an Alaskan army post which has not one thing to do with the story. He has tried, also, to make it zestful with a few bedroom blackout lines and has tried, further, to keep it moving by tossing in farcical situations which are unfunny.

Miss Mosheim, an actress of the Berlin school, tries with every cute resource of a player from Mittel-Europa to keep things going. She can't. Mr. Post is quite dull as a dull husband, and Mr. Heydt is just plain stuck with a silly role. Lotus Wilder has an amusing moment as a party-crashing drunk.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
March 8, 1945

'Calico Wedding' Retells Lonely Wife Theme

By BURTON RASCOE

"CALICO WEDDING," by Sheridan Gibney, which opened at the National last night, is little more than an ancient azure wheeze spun out for three acts. There is also a prologue that is quite unnecessary and, considering there are many thousands of husbands, young and old, away from home in the service, in very bad taste.

The story is the one about the young wife made restless by the neglect of a husband who is ambitious to rise up in the world in a hurry. Mr. Gibney, to be sure, tells it with a certain adroitness and many an amusing turn of phrase; but he not only doesn't vary the general pattern but drags in some ancient gag situations and stock characters to pad it out.

The cast is a good one and those in minor bits, such as Jane Hoffman (as a nightclub souse), Jerome P. Thor (as a Continental wolf), Forrest Orr, (as a vitamin pill magnate) and Eva Condon (as a maid), as well as the principals, make the very most of their lines and business under the skillful timing of Mr. Gibney's direction.

Good Cast

Grete Mosheim, the Berlinese actress, is cute, vivacious and European in her style of acting and is therefore adapted to the role of the wife, who is a Dutch immigrant in the comedy. Louis Jean Heydt, as the dumb and bashful Antarctic explorer, got most of the laughs of the evening, largely by facial pantomime. And William Post, as the negligent husband, gives a better account of himself than the part would seem to allow.

THE CAST

Capt. George Gaylord	William Post
Lieut. Jensen	Roderich Winchell
Nora	Eva Condon
Mary Gaylord	Grete Mosheim
Herbert Abercrombie	Forrest Orr
Mrs. Abercrombie	Mary Sargent
Frederick Boynton	Louis Jean Heydt
Betty Marlowe	Patricia White
Peg Hall	Barbara Joyce
Alma Biddle	Joy Geffen
Hendrik Van Deiden	Jerome P. Thor
"Cap" Wilson	Henry Richards
Lotus Wilder	Jane Hoffman
Alan Packard	Vincent Gardner
Bob Willard	John Kane

The play opens with a prologue in an Army meteorological and radio listening post in Alaska. The two married men, stationed for six months away from civilization, begin wondering whether their wives are faithful, and one of them can't be sure because he still doesn't know just what happened on the night of his second (calico) wedding anniversary. The play recounts all but one important point of what happened, and so the audience, too, at the end, is left to its own surmises, with the weight of the evidence in favor of fidelity.

Old, Old Story

The play proper opens in the Gaylord bedroom in a New York apartment. Tomorrow is the second anniversary of their marriage, and the zealous young advertising copywriter has forgotten it. Smarting under her husband's seeming indifference to her, the wife plans a party to which she invites four of her old suitors and no women. But four women show up accidentally, along with the boss and his wife and a woman-shy geographer who has just returned as the hero of a polar expedition sent to check on Adm. Byrd's findings.

From there on the wheeze branches out into something very like the original Avery Hopwood farce from which "Good Night Ladies" was adapted, except that the emotionally repressed scientist in this play inadvertently (while taken drunk with Miss Mosheim, who gets plastered also) teaches the husband some facts of life, instead of learning them, as in the Hopwood whizz-bang.

Though witty in spots, "Calico Wedding" falls between two stools: it is too corny and moth-eaten in plot and situation for the cognoscenti and not broad and bawdy enough for the crowd.

NEW YORK SUN
March 8, 1945

'Calico Wedding,' Produced At the National, Silly and Lightweight Comedy

By WARD MOREHOUSE

BROADWAY, shaken lately by censorship and darkened by the curfew, returned last night to the half-forgotten practice of play producing, and the trail led again to the harassed National. There, under the incautious guidance of Lester Meyer and Richard Myers, "Calico Wedding" received its first performance.

"Calico Wedding" is feeble and hopeless. An incompetent little play, it is the work of Sheridan Gibney, a Hollywood writer of standing, and it was done some years ago in the fastness of Maine. Now, considerably altered, it is brought into the National and the event gives no cause for cheering.

Mr. Gibney's slight fable is of a second (or calico) anniversary crisis in the home of the Gaylords. The young wife is neglected because her husband, once a star athlete, is giving too much time to Big Business. They have an anniversary party and she gets quite tight with a shy young explorer, just returned from the South Pole. The next morning she and the antarctic adventurer are a little vague about it all. But the husband, after a night at the club, has resolved to devote more time to the home.

The play is quite fumbling and formless. The opening scene of a radio listening post in Alaska, 1944, serves as a prologue and the rest of the piece is done as a flashback. The drinking scene of Act Two brings memories to a few not so venerable playgoers of a wonderful farce called "Fair and Warmer," but in that farce the scene was funny. Madge Kennedy would know.

Louis Jean Heydt returns to Broadway as the explorer and he takes whatever acting honors the evening affords. He learned about playing comedy scenes when working for Brock (Harvey) Pemberton in that hit known as "Strictly Dishonorable." Grete Mosheim is the young wife and she is quite exhausting. William Post has a strenuous evening in the role of the husband. Forrest Orr, not having much luck with his run of plays this season, bounds about as the husband's boss. Eva Condon is her capable and experienced self in the small role of a maid.

"Calico Wedding," like so many other plays of recent months, doesn't justify the considerable cost of its production. Mr. Gibney's play is a silly and lightweight comedy.

NEW YORK POST
March 8, 1945

'Calico Wedding'—A Very Sleazy Piece of Goods

By WILELLA WALDORF

"CALICO WEDDING," Sheridan Gibney's new comedy produced last night at the National, is an obnoxious variation of the old plot about the silly wife who thinks her husband is neglecting her for his business. Although it is elaborately set on a revolving stage, nearly all of it takes place in the Gaylords' living room. The producers, however, have hired Frederick Fox to design a bedroom as well, introducing for a mercifully brief period the sort of pajama-and-twin-bed comedy that always gets a few cat-calls from the gallery.

Since the play proper is carefully laid in 1937 to avoid the war, a 1944 prologue shows the husband languishing in an icy and remote Army post telling a brother officer all about his wife's escapade of seven years before. The sole purpose of the prologue is apparently to destroy any faint glimmer of suspense the play might otherwise have had.

As a matter of fact, it is impossible to recall the prologue after seeing the play without wondering how George Gaylord ever managed to stay married to little Mary Gaylord for seven more years. She is the sort of wife who inspires sash-weight murders.

Mr. Gibney seems to imagine that because he is writing what he calls a comedy, it is unnecessary to make anything in it very credible. He brings people into the Gaylords' living room on the flimsiest of pretexts, and asks his audience to believe that a doting wife, giving her husband a surprise party on their second wedding anniversary, invites only four old beaux.

Heydt Returns

Rendering Mr. Gaylord intensely jealous is apparently her idea, but the boys bring along some girls, and it ends in Mr. Gaylord taking an inebriated female home to Fordham, leaving his wife with nothing to do but get tipsy with the only really amusing character in the play, an intrepid but rather absent-minded